

How teachers of an urban school corporation in the Midwest approach teaching multicultural democracy education in U.S. History classes.

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Introduction

Teaching History in the traditional way has always been criticized as making History boring and not challenging students’ critical thinking ability. Using the multicultural democracy model makes History more interesting to students. Such students also graduate being more aware of their responsibilities in the society. **Multicultural democracy is not the same thing as multicultural education. Multicultural education concerns itself with students knowing, appreciating and respecting the diverse cultures in our society, and their respective contributions to the society. Unlike multicultural education, multicultural democracy incorporates other forms of diversity in addition, including religious diversity, gender diversity, diversity in sexual orientation, diversity in socioeconomic class (Marri, 2003).**

Multicultural democracy in addition to all that multicultural education does involves:

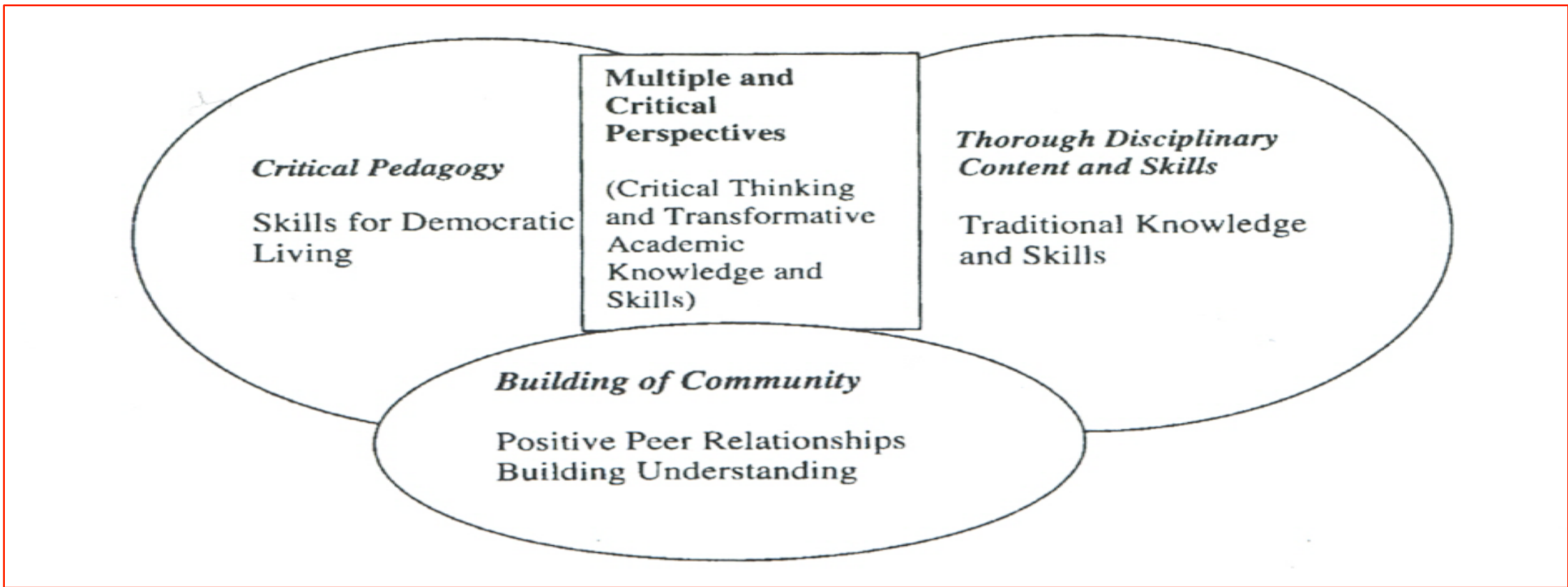
- ❖ Teacher employing deliberative and critical pedagogies to examine historical events as well as past and current issues,
- ❖ Students enjoying thorough disciplinary content and different perspectives in the classroom including mainstream academic knowledge and transformative academic knowledge (Banks, 1995),
- ❖ Teacher challenging students to think critically about history, historical events and social issues, instead of accepting views and positions that have always been accepted by the generality of scholars and the society without questioning,
- ❖ Students from different socio-economic-cultural backgrounds working collaboratively in critical examinations of issues, thereby getting to know one another’s socio-economic-culture better,
- ❖ Students getting to know how the society treats or views different communities in the society, especially the marginalized communities, and collectively agreeing as to what the society can do better in society’s views, perspectives and treatment of different socio-economic-cultural communities/groups,
- ❖ Through social activism, students influence the society into behaving in the spirit of a true democratic society.

Research Questions

- Do social studies teachers of an urban Midwest School Corporation use multicultural democracy model in their U.S. History classes?
- What motivate(s) the teachers that do, and why is it that teachers that do not, do not?

Literature Review

Available literatures indicate that teachers that use multicultural democracy model are motivated by personal interest in and history in activism. It is not common to see all the elements of multicultural democracy in a class. However, turning politically disengaged students into socially active citizens is an essential element that must be present in a multicultural democracy education. So also is the collaboration between students of diverse backgrounds, teaching of all sides to every story, and social activism by students. Professor Anand Marri of the Teachers College, Columbia developed what he calls Classroom-Based Multicultural Democratic Education (CBMDE) framework:



Anand Marri’s Classroom-Based Multicultural Democratic Education Framework

Method

Qualitative methods were used to collect data separately from four (two male and two female) teachers using semi-structured interviews. These four teachers were the ones that showed interest in participating in the study. The principals of secondary schools in the Corporation’s secondary schools were asked to recommend U.S. History teachers. Each of the principals rather asked any of the U.S. teachers that might be interested to get in touch with the researcher. The teachers are here given pseudo names for privacy and confidentiality. Ms Jennifer Johnson has been teaching U.S. History for seven years. Ms Michele Harris has been teaching for twenty seven years, this is her ninth year teaching in high school and has taught Psychology, Government and U.S. history. Mr. Terry Williams has twenty five years experience teaching U.S. History and Psychology. Mr. Gregory Vincent has taught for forty five years.

Analysis

Analysis of responses was done by coding the interview data. The following themes emerged during coding – *There is time constraint in U.S. History class hence difficult to teach multicultural democracy education; Multicultural democracy education is best taught in Government classes and not in History classes and The Corporation does not dictate what is taught in the classroom, there is academic freedom.* Concerning time constraint in U.S. History class, Mr. Williams said “There is time constraint. The push right now is to make U.S. History a three-semester course instead of the current two semesters. That will allow for multicultural democracy education”. Ms. Johnson said I am behind already, we don’t discuss current affairs unless when there is something big like the Boston bomb – the students had a lot of questions like ‘will he get a fair trial?’. On multicultural democracy education best being taught in Government class, Mr. Williams said “it’s in Government class that social activism and political activism can be taught” Even Ms. Harris who is politically active in the community and discusses politics in her class said “my Government class and not history class is current affairs driven.” They all agree that the Corporation does not dictate what they teach in their classrooms. Mr. Vincent said that “being close to XYZ University, the Corporation has to be careful about academic freedom. Some people take that seriously”. They all claim to teach other perspectives even though it was only Mr. Vincent that uses a transformative text in addition to the recommended text. He said “We use a movie that is very popular called The History of us. There is some serious problem with the program. It’s almost entirely white, entirely from Judeo-Christian point of views. So I balance it with reading Howard Zinn. Zinn’s is a socialist’s point of view. He points out women, blacks, and Indians views of the same event”.

Findings

- ❖ The answer to the first research question of whether the teachers of the Corporation use multicultural democracy model is negative. Even though some elements of multicultural democracy education takes place in all the four teachers’ classes, there was no indication of deliberative and critical pedagogies in the classrooms nor students’ social activism.
- ❖ What takes place in the classrooms is more of multicultural education than multicultural democracy education.
- ❖ Concerning the motivation for the elements of multicultural democracy education in all the four teachers’ U.S. History classes, the motivation is the interest in, and or history of social activism by the particular teachers.
- ❖ The study confirmed that the more politically conscious a teacher is, the more the elements of multicultural democracy in his or her U.S. class. Mr. Vincent for example said “in the 60s, we fought for black studies. I was on the Little 500 Group that raised storm until my university integrated. I was in anti-war demonstrations. It doesn’t leave you”.
- ❖ The two least politically conscious of the four teachers, Ms Johnson and Mr. Williams, were the ones that used time as excuse for not teaching multicultural democracy.

Further study of multicultural democracy education in the Corporation will be needed to support the findings of this study.

Limitations

The number of teacher-participants is a limitation. That more of multicultural education instead of multicultural democracy education is what all the teachers teach is also a limitation.